

LIBERALISM
IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
EUROPE

IRENE COLLINS



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LIBERALISM
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I

THE TERM "LIBERAL," meaning a type of political opinion, was new in the nineteenth century. The word itself was not new, but hitherto it had been used to describe a type of education, or to describe a man of generous inclinations—a liberal, open-handed fellow. The political term "liberal" was coined in Spain and was first widely used with reference to the Spanish rebels of 1820. This was an unfortunate beginning for it, since the Spanish rebels were looked down upon by respectable people in Europe; and the term "liberal" consequently came to be regarded as a term of abuse. It was used as such by the French royalists of the Restoration period, who referred to their opponents on the Left of the Chamber as "liberal" in order to imply that they were a disreputable lot. In England the term was at first usually used in its French or in its Spanish form, and we hear from the 1820s scathing references to "English *libéraux*" or "English *liberales*". It was not until the middle of the century that the term was really accepted in England as English and respectable; but once it had been accepted it got itself thoroughly well dug in, and from the 'sixties onwards it took on a very specialised meaning. "Liberal" in England came to mean purely and simply a member of Mr. Gladstone's party.

On the continent of Europe the term never had such a specialised meaning, except perhaps in Belgium. In most other countries of Europe the term liberal was never applied solely to the members of one particular party. Indeed, it was often used to describe at one and the same time men who were vigorously opposing each other on political platforms. When Englishmen wanted to refer to a French liberal they usually chose M. Guizot, who seemed a fairly near approach to their own Mr. Gladstone; but the French not only gave the name liberal to Guizot and the members of his group, they gave it also to Thiers, who was the bitter opponent of Guizot, and they gave it at the same time to Odilon Barrot, who led a political party in opposition to both Guizot and Thiers. In Italy the name liberal was given in the 1840s to writers who advocated a federation of Italian states under the presidency of the Pope, and to writers who urged that Italy should fall into step behind the King of Piedmont.

What was there in common between the motley group of students, merchants and soldiers who made the liberal revolution in Spain in 1820, and an experienced French politician like Guizot? Or between the sophisticated liberal aristocrats of Naples who despised the brutal rule of King Ferdinand IV, and the German professors and lawyers who sat in the Frankfurt Assembly in 1848 and tried to make a united Germany? That they had something in common was realised at least by the opponents of liberalism. Metternich knew a liberal when he met with one, whatever guise the man appeared under. To embrace all the variations of liberalism throughout the century a complicated definition would be required, yet liberals themselves, certainly up to 1860 or 1870, saw nothing complicated in their creed. Whatever twists and turns were demanded of them by circumstances, they held at heart a simple faith: a belief that progress, leading to final perfection, could be achieved by means of free institutions. The liberals of nineteenth-century Europe were not exclusively dreamers and theorists. Liberalism drew its staunchest supporters from business men, technicians and men of the hard-working professions; competent men of sound common sense who applied themselves in a businesslike fashion to the tasks which came to hand. But in liberalism even in its most prosaic forms there was always an idealistic element. The inspiration behind liberalism was not a sense of duty, or a feeling for the inevitable, or a love of tidiness and efficiency, though all these were present to some degree, but the vision of an ideal society. The vision was not strictly speaking a Utopia, an unattainable dream world: it was a vision which liberals believed could be translated into reality, and by a known method. Perfection was to be reached by means of free institutions.

Liberals in practice often betrayed their ideal and often behaved in a manner unworthy of men pursuing an ideal. The French liberals who had talked so much of an ideal society in the 1820s, when they got into power in the 1840s spent much of their time speculating in railway shares for their own financial profit and filling government offices with their own relatives and friends. This kind of behaviour made it easy for Karl Marx to condemn most liberals as insincere and to present their talk of an ideal society as a cloak for selfish ambition. More recently the liberals of the Frankfurt Assembly of 1848 have been singled out for especial condemnation by historians because, after all their talk of freedom, they displayed their greatest energy in an attempt to bring Posen and Bohemia into United Germany by force and against the wishes of the people living there. But it is possible to believe sincerely in an ideal and yet to fall short of that ideal in

one's behaviour, and neither Karl Marx nor sceptical historians of a later date have put forward conclusive reasons for condemning liberals as hypocrites when they proclaimed that free institutions could and would result in progress; progress in all spheres, material and spiritual; progress leading to a perfect society to be enjoyed by all men, of all classes, creeds and nations. When liberals lost sight of this vision, as many did in the closing years of the century, they lost the spirit with which liberals in former days had battled joyously against outnumbering enemies.

Liberals from time to time and from place to place differed as to what they meant by "free institutions". The young liberal advisers of Alexander I of Russia, with little hope of making headway against the diehard Russian aristocracy, were content that the Tsar should begin with a reformed Council of State and leave the idea of a constitution to be considered in the far-distant future. Guizot in France in the 1840s thought that the Revolution of 1830 had established all the free institutions that Frenchmen could possibly require for their progress towards perfection. Cavour in Italy in the 1850s worked to establish a form of government very much like that to be found in England at the time of Sir Robert Peel, though he was prepared to envisage the lower classes playing more part in politics as their education advanced. Many liberals, particularly in the early years of the century, had only vague notions concerning the form which free institutions ought to take; hence the adoption, by both Spanish and Neapolitan liberals in 1820, of the abortive Spanish Constitution of 1812, a concoction produced from the many French constitutions of the revolutionary period and hardly applicable to the circumstances prevailing in southern Europe. None of the liberals believed that the free institutions which they advocated in themselves constituted a perfect state. They were merely the framework within which men would have the best opportunity to advance towards perfection. When Guizot in 1847 insisted that no further reform was needed in France he was not trying to say that France was already perfect, but merely that the essential framework had been established. He was no doubt over-sanguine in his hopes, but his opponents were wrong when they accused him of being completely blind to the suffering going on around him.

Often liberals had to concentrate on achieving some immediate object which they regarded as the first step on the road to freedom. Thus the liberals in Vienna in 1848 agitated for the dismissal of the Chancellor Metternich; the Belgian liberals after 1815 worked for the separation of Belgium from the Dutch crown; the Italian and German liberals worked for national unity. But it must not

be forgotten that their further aim was to set up free institutions. It was this higher aim which distinguished the nationalism of the German liberals of 1848 from the nationalism of Bismarck, who did not fulfil the aims of 1848, as he is sometimes credited with doing, so much as denature and destroy them. It was this higher aim, too, which distinguished the making of United Italy by Cavour from the making of United Germany by Bismarck. If Cavour's methods were sometimes regrettably like those of Bismarck, his final aim was fundamentally different; he worked for a freedom which Bismarck never understood.

After 1815, liberals in Europe tended to look to France for a shining example of freedom, and for support in their own struggles. After 1830 they ceased to do so. The result of the 1830 Revolution in France profoundly disappointed liberals elsewhere in Europe. The aim of the new French King, Louis-Philippe, seemed to be solely to kick down the revolutionary ladder by which he had risen, and to dissociate himself and France from revolutionary movements anywhere in Europe. In their disappointment, liberals elsewhere in Europe learnt in time to turn away from France and to look rather to their own efforts. Oddly enough, they learnt to do this from men whom we cannot count as belonging to the liberal cause. German liberals learnt from the works of Hegel to think that Germany was destined to play the leading rôle in Europe, and in 1848 we find them urging that Germany, not France, should give the shining example to Europe. Italian liberals learnt to stand on their own feet from Mazzini, the democrat. That Italy must help herself, and that each nation must fulfil its own destiny, was the most potent part of Mazzini's teaching; it was the message which caused Metternich to describe Mazzini as the most dangerous man in Europe. Only after 1848 did Italian liberals unlearn the lesson and turn again to France, under Louis Napoleon, for active help. Louis Napoleon restored some of France's prestige among European liberals by his two earliest exploits in foreign policy—his intervention in the Crimean War, which discredited Russian autocracy by revealing its military weakness, and his help to Cavour in driving the Austrians out of Lombardy. His incentive in European politics was romantic rather than liberal, however, and at home he sapped the strength of liberalism by giving the French people more material benefits than they had ever received from the freer governments of earlier years.

It is nevertheless to France that we usually look for expositions of liberal theory. French liberals had some experience of government at their command; they were not silenced, except for brief intervals, by censorship laws; they did not have to concentrate

their energies in a nationalistic movement; they were in a better position than most for theorising. In the early years of the nineteenth century we find many French liberals urgently stressing the point that liberalism was a new creed. They could not deny that men in former times had worked for liberty, but they contended that the liberty which had been seen in ancient Greece and Rome, and even the liberty understood in the French Revolution, was entirely different from the liberty which would appear in the modern world. This anxiety to show that a break had been made with the past arose from an anxiety to deny all connection with the excesses of the French Revolution. Most people in France and indeed in Europe dreaded a recurrence of the turmoil and bloodshed of the Revolution, and most liberals felt obliged to fight these memories of the Revolution as their worst enemies. When Benjamin Constant, in a speech before a learned society in Paris in 1819, condemned the liberty of the ancient world as subjecting the individual to the community, he was clearly thinking of the Jacobins, and his elaborate argument on this occasion was really in the same category as the impassioned claim which he made to the French voters in the next election: "We do not want any revolutions!"

This denial of the past put French liberals in sharp contrast to English liberals, who liked to trace their descent in unbroken line as far back as Magna Carta. The English liberals' fondness for the past was to French liberals a sign that the English, successful though they were in the practice of parliamentary government, did not really understand the nature of liberty. What the Englishman wanted, said the French, was not liberty, but a collection of liberties; not freedom for everybody, but privileges for everybody. Yet the French owed a great deal to the past which some of them denied so vigorously; especially to the recent past. The real origin of their creed lay in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, known as the Enlightenment. From the Enlightenment, and especially from Rousseau, came the belief that man can on earth and by his own efforts achieve perfection; because man is born good, and given the right surroundings, he will grow in goodness. From the Enlightenment, too, came the belief that the right surroundings consist of free institutions. From the Enlightenment, the belief that the fight for a perfect state of happiness on earth must be waged, cannot be neglected, because it is the whole object of man's life on earth. Man has been born with intelligence and talents so that he can advance at least a few steps in the right direction and benefit others who come after him. All these older ideas were to be found at the heart of the so-called

"new" liberalism; but they had to be stated in a new form. For one thing, they had to be extricated from all talk of "reason". There was a popular assumption in the nineteenth century, wrong but no less powerful, that the "reason" of the eighteenth century had been cold and hard and heartless, allowing no room for faith and feeling, and the early nineteenth century, which was an emotional age, would have nothing to do with it. The old idea of liberty had also to be dissociated from "equality". "Liberty, equality, fraternity" had been the motto of 1789, but the Revolution had shown that talk of equality led to demands which lovers of liberty were not always ready to concede.

For re-stating the old beliefs in a new form, Europe was indebted to a group of French liberals called the *doctrinaires*. The group deserves to be better known by historians than it has been hitherto. The politicians of the group sat on the Left-centre of the French Chamber in the 'teens and 'twenties of the century; amongst them was the philosopher Royer-Collard, whose long dissertations upon "the *juste milieu*" taught liberals how to interpret the French Revolution. The chief publicists of the group were Guizot and Charles de Rémusat, and the members met socially in the salon of the Duchesse de Broglie. From their writings and speeches we can formulate a statement which might well have come from any liberal in Europe at any time later in the century. The individual can best achieve his own welfare through the welfare of all. No individual can know what is the welfare of all, so some political system must be devised which allows the voice of each individual to be heard. Essential features of such a political system are: a freely elected parliament to deliberate upon the laws; a ministry dependent on that parliament, to carry out the laws; a judicature entirely independent of other branches of government, to deal with offenders against the laws; freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom for the individual to enter any trade or profession according to his ability, freedom for the individual to accumulate property and to possess it in safety. In this way the individual can find his fullest expression and will be able to grow in that essential goodness which leads to perfection.

An important difference between this conception of liberty and those of the eighteenth century lies in the origin which it attributes to individual freedom. Most eighteenth-century philosophers had favoured the idea that the individual possessed natural rights which were quite independent of the State and which the State was obliged to recognise. This idea, expressed in the American Bill of Rights of 1776 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man preceding the

first French Constitution of 1791, had been a powerful weapon in the destruction of the personal privileges so well known to the ancient régime; but it had also contained the seeds of endless revolution. If freedom belongs to nature and not to the State, government institutions must be reduced to a minimum so that natural law can flourish: an anarchical idea which seemed to the liberals of the nineteenth century more conducive to chaos than to liberty. They favoured, rather, Rousseau's conception of civil liberty. The individual has no rights in nature; he merely has claims, which might in nature be thwarted by the claims of other individuals. These claims become rights only when they are recognised by society, and when the State guarantees to each individual the liberty which does not conflict with the liberty of others. The belief in natural rights was to have some lingerings in the nineteenth century. From it came the belief, prevalent in the many disturbances of 1820, that the mere publication of a "paper" constitution guaranteeing men's rights would suffice to achieve liberty, regardless of tradition and social background; from it, too, came the tendency amongst many liberals to regard the State as the inevitable enemy of the individual. But the clearest thinkers discarded it from the beginning.

Another difference is the emphasis on the individual rather than on the people. It is in the individual rather than in the people that the goodness which will lead to perfection is to be found. The French Revolution had shown that "the people" is something different from a sum-total of individuals, and in the nineteenth century, references to "the people" came from democrats rather than from liberals. The idea of "the sovereignty of the people" could not be discarded altogether, because it was needed as a guarantee against assumptions of sovereignty by the monarch, but henceforth sovereignty of the people was to be recognised as limited by liberty of the individual. Royer-Collard's invocation of "the sovereignty of reason", which he believed resided in a sphere above the conflicting interests of individuals, was rejected by most liberals as leading back to Rousseau's doctrine of the general will. Respectability was a craving by no means confined to Victorian England, and it was with a creed shorn of all elements that had come to be regarded as disreputable that European liberals made their attack upon the old order.

II

If liberalism had been only an attack upon the old order, its task would have been difficult enough. The old order was by no

means as decrepit as liberals liked to pretend, for the absolute monarchs controlled the armed forces of their realms, and they had learnt, from Napoleon, to extend their bureaucracies and to equip themselves with police forces and spy services. Many people had a vested interest in the maintenance of the old régime—a factor whose importance was demonstrated very clearly in the collapse of the 1848 Revolution in Austria. The theory of legitimacy, with which Metternich tried to bolster up absolute monarchy in western Europe, was not very impressive, but Russian Tsars continued to derive strength and zeal from their belief in the divine right of kings, and their sense of a mission to Europe led Alexander I in the 1820s and Nicholas I in 1849 to offer their services in defence of the old order in western Europe. This was not the whole of the problem, however. Despotism was sometimes of a new order, as in the case of Napoleon III and Bismarck. Napoleon III's "caesarian democracy" had a wide appeal in France, whilst Bismarck's stand against the Prussian parliament in the early 'sixties seemed justified by the ever-growing success of his nationalist campaign.

Moreover, liberals felt obliged all along to take action against another new creed: democracy. Democracy, like liberalism, had had its origin in the philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the two had developed side by side for a time, but they had parted company during the French Revolution. The democratic ideal—that all political power should belong to the people—seemed to the liberals to spell tyranny rather than liberty. They believed that it would lead to the tyranny of the mass over the individual and of the majority over the minority, and as proof they pointed to the example of Jacobinism during the French Revolution. Jacobinism was hardly a fair trial of democracy, but nineteenth-century liberals were too near to it to admit that, or perhaps even to see it. Jacobinism had shown them all the worst features of democracy, and consequently they not only hated democracy but feared it, with a fear that could very easily turn to sheer panic, as it did in France after the rising of the workers in June 1848. The fear of democracy brought with it other fears; amongst them the fear of revolution. Liberals always remembered that Jacobinism had come to the fore as the result of a revolution prolonged beyond its original aims; and though the liberals made many revolutions during the nineteenth century, they always tried to stop their revolutions after the initial stages. This was one of the most noticeable features of the revolutions of 1848. As soon as free institutions had been established, and sometimes when they had merely been promised, the liberals began forming National Guards

and taking other security measures, lest the populace should begin to make demands which had not been included in the original programme.

The fear of democracy also brought with it the fear of republicanism. A Republic, in which not only the parliament but the President was elected by the people, would encourage too much mass intervention in politics, and the President would be too much under the influence of the majority opinion which had carried him into office. The liberals wished to destroy absolute monarchy in Europe, but most of them dare not go the whole way and destroy monarchy entirely. They recognised the value of kings as centres of loyalty, as permanent heads of society, as defenders of government institutions against popular attack. What they really wanted to do was to persuade the old absolute monarchs of Europe to grant parliaments and other free institutions and then help in defending them. This was a much more difficult task than an attack on monarchy, because it meant trying to co-operate with kings who were never enthusiastic about the cause and who could seldom be relied upon to stick to it even if they were driven to join it in moments of weakness. Liberals were again and again let down by the monarchs with whom they were trying to co-operate, but most of them persevered, even when the monarch in question was as stupid as Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont. Austrian liberals, in spite of their betrayal by the Emperor Ferdinand in 1848, threw in their lot with the new Emperor Francis Joseph and imagined, in the 1860s, that they could bribe him into granting free institutions by supporting the claims of his dynasty to rule Greater Germany. French liberals between 1814 and 1870 tried three kings and an emperor in the attempt to achieve the permanent head which they thought so necessary to a constitutional régime, and when they were finally driven in the 1870s, by the obstinacy of the Bourbon Pretender, to accept a Republic, they consoled themselves by making it as little like a Republic as an unmonarchical state could be.

An obvious move in the struggle against democracy was for liberals to cling to a limited franchise. The Italian Moderates of the 1840s and 1850s could easily defend such a policy in a country where large numbers of the population were illiterate, but the task was more difficult for Guizot in France, where radical orators claimed that the electoral law of 1831 excluded from the franchise many millions of bourgeois who had all the education necessary to understand the use of a vote. To all attacks Guizot replied that freedom could not be improved upon merely by increasing the number of voters—an argument which gained some support from

the events of a later age, when extensions of the franchise brought with them methods of electioneering little in keeping with liberal ideas on the supremacy of the individual. Unfortunately, Guizot and his supporters used weapons even less justifiable than a limited franchise: they curtailed two of their own dearest freedoms, liberty of the press and liberty of association, so anxious were they to prevent democratic leaders from appealing to the public. It is more to the credit of German liberals in the post-1870 period that they refused to pass penal legislation against the Social Democrats, although this refusal worked towards their own downfall. In Italy the struggle between liberalism and democracy crystallised, in the middle years of the century, into the struggle between Cavour on the one hand and Mazzini and Garibaldi on the other. Cavour saw Mazzini as a demagogue and dictator combined, a man who would stir the masses to action and then dominate them in their ignorance; whilst Garibaldi, with his irresponsible guerilla activities and his extraordinary sympathy for the depressed peasantry of southern Italy, could hardly fail to jeopardise the parliamentary state which Cavour was patiently founding on the middle-class society of the north. In the dramatic year of 1860, which afterwards ranked as the pinnacle of Cavour's liberal achievement, Mazzini remained under sentence of death from the Piedmontese government, and Cavour did all he could to prevent Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily.

Liberals always spoke of democracy as a disreputable force, springing from all the worst passions of mankind. In French middle-class homes in the early nineteenth century the words democracy and republic were not considered suitable for use before the children. Democrats, on the other hand, presented liberalism as a selfish creed, shrouded in a lot of talk about freedom for everybody, but in actual fact designed to put power and privileges into the hands of the middle classes. This was a powerful argument because it could be supported by fact. French liberal governments during the July Monarchy failed in eighteen years to pass a single measure of social reform. They claimed that social legislation demanded too much activity from the state; and French liberalism never produced a group like the English Benthamites whose ideas on the duties of the state could act as a corrective to exaggerated notions of *laissez-faire*. When Guizot refused to introduce so much as a poor law, democrats hastened to the conclusion that here was liberalism in its true colours. One great French liberal, Alexis de Tocqueville, knew that this was not liberalism in its true colours, but liberalism in the hands of selfish men, and in 1847 he urged the deputies to mend their ways before it was too late;

but he entirely failed to convince them of the urgency of the situation. At this point matters were complicated by the events of the 1848 revolution in France. The demands put forward by the workers during the months from February to June 1848 were so excessive that property-owners began to fear for the safety of private property. Shopkeepers could not sell anything because people preferred to keep their property in cash lest they should have to flee the country; and as late as 1851 farmers were cutting down their corn before it was ripe lest at any moment their fields should be seized and divided into strips amongst the workers. After this panic, any political party which wanted to keep middle-class votes had to promise the protection of property and had to keep off any social reform which might in the smallest way strike at the interests of property owners. Social reform on the Continent became almost exclusively the property of the democrats, and socialism and democracy allied against liberalism increasingly as the century proceeded. Consequently liberalism was regarded by many people as a conservative creed, even as an outworn creed, long before it had finished its attack on the old order in Europe.

Meanwhile liberals had had other enemies to face. The most insidious enemy, in the early years of the century, was romanticism. Amongst the origins of romanticism lay a desire to free the individual mind and heart from the cold intellectualism of eighteenth century reason, and in consequence a romantic outlook on life was sometimes combined with liberal views on politics. This was the case with Benjamin Constant in France, with Stein in Prussia, and at a later date with the brothers Gagern, who played so important a part in the German revolution of 1848. More often, however, romanticism in politics looked back upon the past, which it saw through rose-coloured spectacles as an age of faith and feeling and chivalry. Liberals in France quickly saw the dangers of these views, and most of them promptly attacked romanticism in all its forms. French liberal newspapers in the 'teens and 'twenties hotly defended classical literature against romantic literature; hostile criticisms of romantic poetry were given front-page importance, and an energetic liberal journalist, Armand Carrel, threatened to challenge Victor Hugo to a duel over the interpretation of a passage in Bossuet. The romantics, meanwhile, ranged themselves on the side of the restored monarchy, and encouraged Charles X to squeeze every ounce of power for himself out of the constitutional settlement of 1814. They encouraged him in romantic displays such as the return to the ancient form of coronation at Rheims, and touching for the king's evil, and many young romantics joined a secret society, the Knights of the Faith, whose double object was

to restore Frenchmen to more faith and feeling and to restore absolute monarchy.

Elsewhere in Europe the antipathy between liberalism and romanticism was not so clearly demonstrated. Romanticism, for all its strange manifestations, sprang from generous sentiments, and the men who took to it were often ready to plunge into self-sacrifice on behalf of the oppressed. Hence romantics were to be found fighting on the side of the Greeks in the War of Independence, and in similar exploits which caused them to be confused in the popular mind with the liberals. Metternich added to the confusion by persecuting both with equal vigour, since to him the fanatical young men who insisted on a return to chivalry seemed just as dangerous to the established order as the more ponderous gentlemen who asked for parliamentary institutions. But romanticism and liberalism were nevertheless distinct in essence, and more often than not mutually hostile, and in one sphere at any rate romanticism did great harm to the liberal cause. This was in Germany, where the movement for national unity had far more romanticism than liberalism in it from the beginning. The student societies which Metternich persecuted were inspired by romantic aims of uniting Germany so that she might return to her past greatness, rather than by liberal aims of uniting her so that the freedom of the individual might triumph. Whilst it is possible to find some liberalism in Germany in the early years of the century, liberalism did not really begin to get any sort of hold there until the 1840s, and even then many liberals mistakenly believed the romanticism of Frederick William IV of Prussia to be compatible with their own views. When the Frankfurt Assembly met in 1848 few people in Germany understood the liberal as distinct from the nationalist aspect of the Assembly's aims, and the Assembly was afterwards criticised for having spent too much time in pursuit of free institutions instead of trying to achieve German unity by hook or by crook.

The leading place amongst the opponents of liberalism must be given, however, to the Roman Catholic Church. The opposition of the Church appeared on two fronts, one practical and Italian, the other theoretical and European, and it lasted throughout the century.

In Italy, liberalism meant nationalism, for there seemed to be no hope of getting rid of the baleful influence of Austria, and the despotism of the petty princes of Italy, without some form of national unity. Nationalism in its most obvious form would mean the Church losing its lands in central Italy, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Pope still regarded the possession of these lands as necessary to the independence and hence to the

spiritual authority of the Church. Nationalism was thus made to look like an attack not merely on the Church's temporal possessions, but on its spiritual power. In the 1840s a group of nationalist writers headed by Gioberti tried to solve the dilemma by suggesting that Italy need not become a unitary state; she could form a confederation, each state keeping its own ruler and each uniting with the others under some form of federal government. The proposal won a large number of adherents in Italy, but Mazzini and other radicals spurned it from the beginning as worse than useless to true nationalists, and it eventually collapsed in 1848 from its failure to cope with the Austrian problem. Theoretically speaking, Austria could have been allowed to keep Lombardy-Venetia and rule it as part of a new Italian confederation, but few Italian nationalists would consider any such proposal. The Austrians must be driven out of Italy, and when the Pope declined, as he needs must, to countenance any such movement, the initiative passed to Piedmont. Cavour began modernising the Piedmontese state ready to play its part in the freeing of North Italy, and some of his earliest measures consisted of a serious reduction in the secular power of the Church, but he had no intention of attacking the spiritual power of the Church. Nor had he any intention of doing so in 1859 and 1860, when events drove him to annex the greater part of the Papal States. Cavour offered to Pius IX proposals for a settlement very similar to those accepted at a later date by Leo XIII, but Pius would have nothing to do with them. Italian unity had to be achieved in direct opposition to the wishes of the Church and by actually taking arms against her; and even when United Italy was an accomplished fact, Pius IX continued to demonstrate his hostility to the creation. This made many difficulties for the new Italian kingdom, which had a hard enough task anyway to win and hold the loyalty of the mass of the Italian people. It also made clear to liberals everywhere in Europe that Pius IX had dissociated the Church from what they regarded as liberalism's finest achievement.

Behind the Italian conflict lay a conflict of ideas which was of European significance. Liberalism undeniably contained many beliefs which were contrary to the teaching of the Church. The belief that man is born good, that his progress is inevitable, that he can by his own efforts reach perfection on earth—all these were contrary to the Church's teaching on Original Sin, on salvation through Christ, and on the sovereignty of God over earth and heaven. But there were other aspects of liberalism. A courageous French priest, Lamennais, tried to persuade his fellow churchmen that liberalism should be accepted and encouraged by the Church

because it sprang from instincts which were truly Christian ; from the desire to recognise the dignity of man born in the image of God, and from the desire to allow men the free use of the faculties given them by God. The French bishops were not convinced, and in November 1831 Lamennais journeyed to Rome, seeking a pronouncement from Pope Gregory XVI in favour of his views. Gregory at first temporised, and Lamennais returned to France in a hopeful frame of mind, but before he had actually reached France he received from the Pope an encyclical letter whose content amounted to a complete rejection of all that he had urged. In fairness to Gregory, one can show that he could hardly have done otherwise. It is not the duty of the Pope to keep abreast of prophets like Lamennais so much as to see that the flock stays within the fold, and liberalism at this time contained much that was likely to lead the ordinary man astray. One can show, too, that the responsibility for the encyclical rests as much, if not more, with Lamennais as with Gregory. For more than a year Gregory had turned a blind eye to the newspaper which Lamennais was publishing in France, and Lamennais should have been content to be tolerated. The encyclical *Mirari vos* made clear for the first time that liberalism, in spite of its many good qualities, could find no accommodation in the most spacious of all churches. Some fourteen years later liberals hoped for accommodation from a new Pope, Pius IX, who was said to have liberal sympathies, but their hopes were founded on an illusion. Pius IX carried out a few reforms in the Papal States, but this was because he was a kind-hearted man and a well-meaning ruler, not because he was a liberal. He allowed liberals in Italy to acclaim him as their leader, but this was because he was too inexperienced of the world to know what liberalism implied. When he discovered that liberalism contained elements of which he could not approve he turned against it in all its forms. In 1864 he denounced liberalism outright, along with pantheism, rationalism, indifferentism, socialism, communism, secret societies and Bible societies, as one of the errors of the age ; ending his declaration with the pronouncement that it was a damnable error to suggest that the Pope could or should reconcile himself to liberty, progress and recent civilisation. Fortunately for liberalism, the Catholic mind rose to the occasion, and large numbers of Frenchmen and Italians, Belgians and Spaniards convinced themselves, by a triumph of adaptation, that they could obey the Pope whilst remaining liberal. Nevertheless, the opposition of the Catholic Church deprived liberalism of much moral force, and continued to harm the liberal cause in Europe to the last years of the century.

By 1870 the countries of western Europe had obtained something like the free institutions for which liberals had fought since the beginning of the century, and Europe entered upon what historians have called "the liberal era". Free institutions had never been regarded as an end in themselves, however ; they were merely the essential beginning, and the time had now come to demonstrate to the world, and especially to those parts of Europe, notably Russia, which remained under despotic governments, that free institutions resulted in progress. Unfortunately the free institutions were by no means firmly founded, and the defence of them against enemies, old and new, might easily prove a task which allowed little room for progress.

Each country presented its own problems. In the Habsburg Empire, transformed by the "compromise" of 1867 into the dual state of Austria-Hungary and ruled according to two separate constitutions, the maintenance of parliamentary government depended on the ability of the liberals to solve the age-old problem of conflicting national claims. In Austria the franchise was limited and organised in such a way as to debar the Czechs from any effective part in political life, and although the hostility which this provoked amongst the Czechs was a serious drag on the new constitutional régime, the liberals dare not try to allay it by extending the franchise. Any concession to the Czechs would have resulted in a policy to obtain similar rights for the Slavs in Hungary, and this would have reduced the power of the Magyars, who alone were strong enough to frighten Francis Joseph into keeping the constitutional settlement of 1867. The inability of the liberals to move towards any solution of the Czech problem, combined with the shock which the economic crisis of 1873 gave to their system of laissez-faire, gradually weakened their popularity even amongst the Austrian Germans, whose interests they were most likely to promote. Francis Joseph grew angry with them when they opposed his occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, and in the general election of the following year he used his influence to bring about the defeat of their candidates. The liberals never again, to the end of the century, achieved a majority in the parliament. For the next fourteen years they saw the conservative Prime Minister Taaffe making a mockery of parliamentary institutions, but their own policy of clinging to a narrow franchise and to an economic policy of laissez-faire which paid exclusive attention to upper middle-class interests failed to find wide enough support to enable them to put up any effective resistance. When the threat from the growing

radical party caused Francis Joseph to dismiss Taaffe in 1893, the liberals could form a government only by allying with conservative groups, and the failure of their coalitions to pursue any effective policy either at home or abroad ended what little patience Francis Joseph had had with the constitutional system. By 1900 he had ceased to obey the most fundamental rules of the constitution, and the liberals were incapable of gathering sufficient strength to oppose his renewed absolutism.

In the new kingdom of Italy the liberal policy of Cavour devolved in 1860 upon the party of the Right, which controlled the destinies of the country for the next sixteen years. The members of the party were faced with the difficult task of assimilating into the parliamentary system the states of central and southern Italy which Cavour had not thought ripe for parliamentary government and which he annexed to his northern kingdom only because he was driven to do so by the activities of Garibaldi. The difficulty of the task was not lessened by the fact that the Right underestimated it. With the exception of Minghetti, the leading members of the Right had no direct knowledge of the central and southern provinces, and the traditions of the Risorgimento had not taught them to pay any attention to the social and agrarian problems of the peasantry. Obligated, in view of the high percentage of illiteracy amongst the Italian people, to keep to a narrow franchise which gave more votes to the northern provinces than to the rest of the country, the Right could hardly have escaped the accusation of dictatorship; but at least the dictatorship ought to have been used to raise the level of wealth and education amongst the mass of the people and thus to pave the way for the extension of political rights. Instead it was used primarily to enhance the greatness of the new kingdom in the eyes of the other powers of Europe. The discontent which prevailed in the south provided a fertile field for radical propaganda, and in 1876 the government of the Right fell before that of the Left. Extension of the franchise inevitably followed, and the results soon showed how little of liberal ideals the mass of the population had imbibed. The new voters were unable to understand their rights except as a means of obtaining corresponding benefits, and this tempted politicians into a system of patronage which quickly discredited parliamentary life. An outward respect for civil liberty and for constitutional forms preserved a façade of liberalism, and this concealed the decadence of the ruling class and the political ignorance of the masses to the end of the century, but it could hardly survive the disintegrating forces which came upon the country in later years.

In the new German Reich the constitution of 1871 established a

parliament elected by universal suffrage and an Imperial Chancellor responsible to parliament. The task of the liberals was to give these institutions more meaning than Bismarck intended them to have. A parliament elected by universal suffrage was more likely to prove a bulwark of authoritarianism than of liberalism, as had been proved in France during the Second Empire; and even if the electorate gave its loyalty to liberal ideals the parliament would have difficulty in making its influence felt upon a government of which only one member was responsible to parliament. In other words, the constitution was a doubtful concession to liberalism, and German liberals, far from being now in control of the political situation, were faced with a despotic power stronger than the despotisms of the early nineteenth century: stronger because it could claim brilliant achievements both at home and abroad, because it was administratively efficient, and because it appeared more forceful and progressive than a liberal creed connected in people's minds with the failures of 1848. Under these circumstances many liberals—indeed the majority of liberal politicians in Germany—saw no prospect of success in opposing Bismarck, and they joined those Prussian liberals who, in 1866, had rallied to Bismarck's support and called themselves the National Liberal Party.

The party contained some of the leading politicians in Germany—Lasker, Forckenbeck, Twesten and Unruh, who had opposed Bismarck in the Prussian parliament in the early 'sixties; Benignsen and Miquel who had led the liberal opposition in Hanover. Miquel announced, "The time for ideals is past, and the duty of politicians is to ask not for what is desirable, but for what is attainable." Yet the National Liberals were not wholly deserting their ideals when they joined Bismarck, nor even suspending them until happier times. Since the unfortunate experiences of 1848 many German liberals had come to distrust what they regarded as "French" views on the proper position and function of parliament in the state. They turned back to the teaching of Hegel and Kant, and from this they imbibed a juridical concept of the state, defining liberty as consisting of legal rights granted by the state to the individual, and used by the individual in such a way as to prevent any encroachment from above or below. In England the common law had been given a place almost equal to that of parliament in the defence of individual freedom; and German liberals, obsessed by the insecurity which seemed to result from complete supremacy of the legislature, were ready to place more faith in the rule of law than in the rule of parliament. This kind of liberty, expounded in the second half of the nineteenth century by Gneist, Laband,

Meyer and Jellinek, might well be found in the political system established by Bismarck, which brought an element of self-government into the administration and allowed the parliament to exercise critical functions. The chief danger was that Bismarck might one day destroy the parliament which he had granted in 1871 as a grudging concession to liberal opinion, and thus place the rule of law in jeopardy. To guard against this danger the National Liberals opposed all Bismarck's attempts to make himself financially independent of parliament. Their success in this field proved to be their undoing, for Bismarck soon tired of allies so lacking in docility. In 1878-9, using to the full his remarkable gifts as a propagandist and political tactician, he destroyed their popularity with the electorate by making them appear disloyal to the Emperor, broke their political party by dividing them on the subject of protection, and discarded their alliance in favour of one with the Catholic Centre party. Bismarck's reliance on conservative groups during the 1880s accelerated the growth of social democracy, and it was with this force, which liberals had always distrusted, that the future of parliamentary institutions in Germany lay at the end of the century.

Even France, with its older tradition of parliamentary government, was no easy field for the liberals after 1870. The Third Republic began its career under the taint of national dishonour and social repression—the acceptance of the humiliating peace terms offered by Bismarck, and the suppression of the Commune. The fear of Jacobinism, which had broken out in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, and the fear of communism, which most Frenchmen wrongly believed to have been responsible for the Commune, would have forced a conservative policy on future governments whether they had wanted it or not, and for twenty years vigorous advances either in foreign policy or in social legislation were out of the question. Left-wing groups, which combined democratic and socialist views with intense patriotism, were likely to become increasingly hostile to a liberal Republic which seemed no different, in essentials, from the July Monarchy. In an attempt to give the Republic wider support the veteran liberal Thiers allied with the radical Gambetta in the elections of 1876, and the so-called "opportunist" programme which resulted from this alliance was carried out energetically by the governments of the 1880s. Its main features were the extension of political rights and the establishment of free, secular and compulsory education: there was a notable lack of any attention to reform of a purely social nature. In other words, liberalism compounded with democracy but refused to make any concession to the socialism with which

democracy had been connected since the days of Louis Blanc. This refusal, along with an equally firm refusal to adopt a policy of revenge against Germany, provoked the dangerous outbreak of caesarism which took place in the name of Boulanger in the years 1886-9. Discredited further by the Panama scandal and the Dreyfus affair, the Opportunist groups were obliged to give way in the last years of the century to the radical ministry of Waldeck-Rousseau. From this time onwards the Republic underwent a much larger infusion of democracy and socialism than liberals would once have thought compatible with freedom of the individual.

Behind these failures, and similar failures elsewhere, lay an increasing doubt as to the efficacy of free institutions to achieve progress. In the early years of the century, when liberals had talked of the need to free the individual so that he could advance towards perfection, the meaning of progress had had a predominantly moral content; but by 1870 philosophy and its allied studies had surrendered pride of place to the exact sciences, and progress came to mean an increasing mastery over the physical universe and an increasing possession of the material benefits which this mastery afforded. These benefits could only be acquired by the individual if he had wealth. The middle classes settled down to the accumulation of wealth with all the hope and determination which they had once put into politics, and in the era of economic expansion which followed on the creation of the new nation-states, they prospered. But economic prosperity now depended to a large extent on national security and power, and governments were often led into foreign policies little in keeping with the ideals of a liberal state.

At the same time, increasing industrialisation brought the growth of urban proletariats anxious to obtain their share in the benefits which they saw around them. Their share did not come to them automatically, as Guizot had thought it would, by the mere force of circumstances; perhaps because the middle classes were more selfish than Guizot had believed, but more certainly because the new economic structure was more impersonal and more complicated than Guizot could ever have envisaged. Radical politicians urged that a reasonable standard of living for the workers could only be obtained by social legislation, but liberal politicians in the 1870s and 1880s held out against such demands, as Gladstone held out against Joseph Chamberlain in England. They gave as their reason their unwillingness to encroach on freedom of the individual, but opponents accused them of selfish class interest, and side by side the two ideas gained ground, that liberalism was a middle

class creed and that the interests of the middle class and the lower class were incompatible. Revolutionary socialism of one kind and another, inspired by Marx, Bakunin and Blanqui, enjoyed a brief vogue amongst advanced politicians in most of the countries of western Europe in the 1870s. In time, however, the development of workingmen's associations and trades unions gave rise to a class of workmen skilled in leadership, trained in workers' politics, and accustomed to negotiating—a working-class intelligentsia, which took over the function performed earlier in the century by the middle-class intelligentsia and acted as a connecting link between the middle and the lower classes. Workmen were persuaded by these new leaders that nothing was to be gained by violence and that everything was to be gained by using the machinery of free speech and free association. By the 1890s there had appeared in most countries a parliamentary socialism of a type which had been developing slowly in England since the days of the Chartists. To this new socialism and its "minimum programmes" liberal politicians felt obliged to make some concessions, telling themselves that they could do so without danger to parliamentary institutions. But concessions to socialism implied an amount of state activity which liberals of an earlier generation would not have countenanced, and the inescapable inference was that liberalism could only cater for the demands of the lower classes by sacrificing its own principles.

In one country of Europe the sacrifice called for seemed to be too great to be contemplated. This was in Russia, which proved to be the scene of liberalism's greatest failure. Very early in the nineteenth century Tsar Alexander I had been attracted to liberal ideas, only to conclude that they were inapplicable in a country where large parts of the population remained under serfdom. Alexander II, more for reasons of state than for any liberal purpose, had emancipated the serfs in 1861, but had failed to assimilate them into the rest of society. The peasants remained a class apart, uneducated, inexperienced, incapable of concerted action to improve their own welfare, and with grievances which demanded attention on every ground of justice and humanity. Victorian doctrines of self-help were hardly applicable; the problem could only be answered by state intervention of a kind and on a scale which seemed to have little in keeping with liberal principles. The small liberal groups which appeared in the Duma of 1906, Russia's first national parliament, had no answer to suggest. They refused to support the proposal by the democratic "Cadet" group, for the expropriation of land; and the field was thus left open for extremist elements of every kind.

By the end of the nineteenth century liberalism was a jaded force compared with what it had been in earlier years. Compromises with enemies old and new had shrouded its meaning, and other political parties, owing much in their origin to liberalism, but inimical to its existence as a political force, had obtained a wider electoral appeal. Optimism remained high, but it was insecurely founded and could not survive the disappointments following on 1918. The inevitability of progress, whether moral or material, appeared then to have been a delusion, and perfection had so far eluded men's grasp as to have passed beyond their hopes. Liberals still aimed at freeing the individual, but not in the certainty that he would achieve perfection so much as in the belief that freedom would enable him to do the best for himself and others in a difficult and unpredictable world. Liberalism had thus put aside many of the idealistic beliefs which had caused Karl Marx to ridicule it and the Catholic Church to denounce it, but in doing so it had lost much of its vigour. It was in a prevailing mood of doubt and despondency that liberalism faced, in the twentieth century, the two greatest threats it had yet seen—the rise of power politics in Germany and of communism in Russia.

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